THE UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES

ALERT

News from the UFMCC
on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment.

March 1992

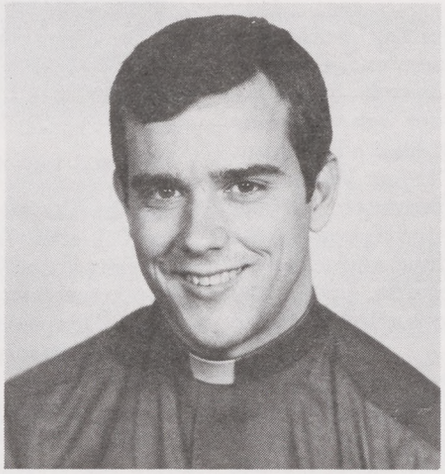
A Celebration of The Rev. Robert Pierce

By the Rev. Steve Pieters

The Rev. Robert Pierce was a good friend to UFMCC AIDS Ministry long before he was diagnosed with AIDS. At the Sacramento General Conference in 1985, I was one of two identified people with AIDS at the conference, and Robert, whom I had never met before, made a point of reaching out to me, keeping me company, and including me in the after-hours fun of any General Conference. When the Rev. Brad AnderSon (who had not been diagnosed yet, either), Robert, and I went to dinner, they made me feel like I was still one of the "hunky young clergy" of the Fellowship, even though my body was wasting from the effects of the experimental drug, suramin.

Robert spoke out boldly as a person with AIDS at the AIDS Forum at General Conference XIV in St. Paul, MN. He forcefully expressed the need for the Fellowship to financially support UFMCC AIDS Ministry. Some people feel it was his speech that moved the Conference to change the budget the next day, providing the Field Director of AIDS Ministry with a full-time salary.

When Robert consecrated Communion at the Opening Memorial Service of General Conference XV in Phoenix, AZ, HIV had wasted his body, but not his spirit. Many people were moved by his steady and faith-filled presence throughout the Conference.



Rev. Robert Pierce

When I visited him and preached in his church in November, he was struggling to remain an effective pastor as the virus ravaged his body and mind. His congregation obviously loved him, and were in great pain because of what they saw happening to their young, handsome pastor. Church of the Trinity MCC has learned many lessons through Robert's faithfulness to the church, much as MCC's in Seattle, Worcester, and Silverlake in Los Angeles.

At the end, he was ready "to go home to Jesus." When he died on January 29, the Fellowship lost a great and feisty pastor. Who knows what he could have accomplished in the 30 years of ministry that should have awaited him.

The people of Church of the Trinity MCC in Sarasota, FL celebrated his life and grieved his death in the first service held in the new church building Robert had worked so hard to have built. The Rev. Elder Jeri Ann Harvey preached at the service, as Robert had requested. She reflected on how human Robert was: how "wonderful and wondrous" he was, yet also how he could be "a real booger sometimes." One of the most memorable moments of the service came after Rev. Elder Harvey prayed: she raised her arms and looking around the brand new sanctuary, shouted, "Robert, just look at what you've done!"

In spite of the sense of loss, many people who attended the service felt that it was very much a celebration of Robert's life. Robert Pierce will be missed by many throughout the Fellowship, but his life calls us to ever more vigilant and loving ministries in the face of this virus that is cutting short the careers of so many vital and faithful people, like the Rev. Robert Pierce. ▼

Pierce VS. Schuller

By the Rev. Elder Nancy Wilson

About five years ago, Robert Pierce and I attended the Schuller Institute together, along with perhaps 30 MCC folks. We were aware that the Schullers were a little nervous about the volume of MCC participation. We were a lively, diverse group, and very bold in our participation.

About mid-conference, Dr. Schuller made his debut, talked about himself and church growth. At one point, he made a pointed homophobic remark. The MCC folks all looked at me (the only Elder present), and I searched for them. Just then, came time for "Questions for Dr. Schuller." Robert's hand shot up, and this attractive, well-groomed former Catholic brother stood up and confronted Schuller. Robert practically bellowed from his toes, saying how offensive, inaccurate and inappropriate Schuller's remarks had been. Robert Pierce said, "Shame on you, Dr. Schuller..."; all the while his eyes would dart over in my direction. Later he told me he kept seeking my eyes and face for reassurance ("How am I doing?")

He was magnificent - pure, righteous, dignified anger. Schuller, on the other hand, become positively apoplectic. He sputtered, said worse things, and had to be literally led off the stage by a staff person. His face was so red, some of us thought he might be in some physical danger or distress. No one who was there that day could ever forget Robert Pierce's courage, which made Dr. Robert Schuller "lose it." ▼

"Nellie Oleson" Touring UFMCC

Alison Arngrim, who played Nellie Oleson on TV's "Little House on the Prairie," has spoken and preached at a number of MCC's since her appearance at the UFMCC General Conference last summer in Phoenix, AZ.

MCC Las Vegas hosted Alison and her husband, Don Spencer, the weekend of November 23.

She spoke at the Friday opening service of the AIDS Vigil where she was received with great ethusiasm. Saturday she did her "Healing through Laughter" workshop. "She had us all on the floor," pastor Rev. Ken Caton reports.

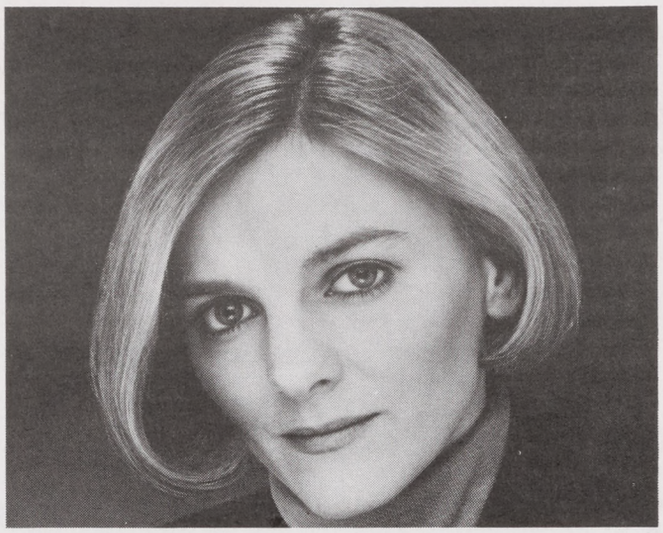
MCC Las Vegas held a press conference early on in her visit, and the press "ate her up:" she and MCC were on both the CBS and ABC affiliates, both on the 5 and 11 o'clock news. Her appearance at MCC was also featured in the Las Vegas Review Journal.

Saturday night, Alison taught her "Safer Sex" workshop, ably assisted by her husband, Don, as her "own personal Vanna White." There were over 50 people there for the 10 pm workshop. People wouldn't leave the Safer Sex workshop after it was over: they kept her there for at least a half hour.

"There were a lot of new people at MCC Las Vegas that weekend, and that's thanks to Alison's appearance. Her visit was a great Church Growth event!" Rev. Caton reported. One of the bonuses of her visit was that her husband was very nurturing towards many of the congregants, and many people commented on how much Don's presence meant to them.

The weekend of February 7, Alison was in Rochester, NY, at the invitation of the Rev. Cathy Elliott, pastor of Open Arms MCC, and an active member of the Greater Rochester AIDS Interfaith Network. Saturday afternoon, Alison did her Safer Sex Workshop, and Saturday night she preached at the annual Interfaith Healing Service. The local media all carried stories about her visit, and her message at the Interfaith Service was received with great enthusiasm. Sunday night, she preached at Open Arms MCC, where they had an unusually large crowd to hear her. Her message was simple but challenging: "If God can use Nellie Oleson, then God can use you, too!"

Rev. Elliott reported that "people came out of the woodwork, and it was a great boost for the whole church. Her visit is definitely helping us with our growth!"



Alison Arngrim - "Nellie Oleson"

Alison has also appeared at Christ Chapel MCC, Santa Ana, CA, MCC Tampa, FL, and at MCC Los Angeles, where, with Rev. Steve Pieters, she co-facilitated a workshop on "The Gospel and Comedy."

MCC Tampa reports that their attendance the Sunday that Alison spoke in worship was way above normal attendance for any Sunday.

Alison orginally became involved with the AIDS movement when the actor who played her husband on "Little House," Steve Tracy, was diagnosed with AIDS in 1984. Tracy died in 1986, but Alison continues to be one of the most active and well-known celebrity AIDS activisits. She works as the Program Manager for Tuesday's Child, a Los Angeles pediatric AIDS service agency. She also is the volunteer host for AIDS Project Los Angeles' cable TV show, "AIDS Vision." She will soon be receiving the First Celebration of Life Award from Aid For AIDS for her dedication and star quality in the fight against AIDS.

If your church or organization is interested in inviting Alison Arngrim for a weekend, contact her at Tuesday's Child in Los Angeles: (213) 467-9901. ▼

"Is The Roof On Yet?"

By the Rev. Elder Jeri Ann Harvey

All of the last two weeks of January, Robert Pierce kept asking, "Is the roof on yet?" He was incoherent much, if not most of the time now, but when he could rally enough to be lucid, he always asked the same question.

He had a dream for his Church of the Trinity MCC and he had put his best effort into making it a reality this past year. AIDS had finally taken over his body and much of his mind, but the soul of who and what he was, was very much still intact: a pastor, a shepherd of a flock...and he wanted that damned roof up. The foundation was dug and the cement poured. The scaffolding and beams went up, the walls and mortar went up, and finally, the last few days of January, the beginning of the roof went on! When he asked this time, Bob told him, "Yes, the roof is on." He wanted to be taken out to see it, but his condition simply would not permit it. So he did the next best thing: he let go of this earthly life and got a heavenly view of the roof on January 29.

A year ago, he had wined and dined me, and then took my hand and said, "You know, I want you to do my memorial service." He was a sneaky little booger. It was the hardest thing I have had to do in a very long time. Robert was more than just a peer to me. He was an incredible man in so many different ways. Generous with everything that he had with anyone who was in need. He had a love of pastoring that was so good to see in our Fellowship.

When I first met him in 1984 in San Francisco's Golden Gate MCC I thought he was the altar boy for the service. Rev. Elder Jim Sandmire said he was his associate pastor and that he was one to "watch" because he was special. Jim was absolutely right. I was preaching at Golden Gate MCC when word came that Robert was hospitalized and it was AIDS.

(cont'd on page 3)

("Is The Roof On Yet?", cont'd from pg 2)

The entire church was deeply grieved by this news, especially Jim Sandmire.

Robert touched many lives in his short visit with us in MCC. He was professional clergy with us for eight years and I underline the word professional.

His memorial service was held in the uncompleted building that had "a roof." His student clergy Bruce performed a miracle along with many who helped and turned this shell into a sanctuary that Robert had to be proud of. Over 300 people attended on a very stormy and wet night. Very nearly every clergyperson in Florida attended and participated in the service. Many clergy from other denominations were there, also, and several community activists.

It was a moving and warm service with the proper amount of laughter, the shared tears, and the strong presence of Christ among us. His ashes stood at the foot of the altar behind a picture of a smiling, healthy Robert of a couple of years ago. His stole was draped around the picture and was removed, folded and given to his lifemate and friend Bob M. Roses were placed alongside the urn by the Board of Directors and Bob.

Robert had told me he wanted complete healing back in Houston during the AIDS conference. He got the complete healing January 29, 1992 when God said, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." Well done, indeed, my much-loved friend. You leave a living testimony in the many lives that you touched with the love of Jesus Christ. The smells and bells were perfect February fifth, my friend, and I know you were proud. ▼

Pastoral Care Conference in Massachusetts

The Center for Ministries at Merrimack College in North Andover, MA, has scheduled a conference called "Our Community's Concern: Pastoral Care and AIDS" for May 29 through June 4, 1992 at the college. The purpose of the conference is "to provide nourishment for those who work with persons living with AIDS and to address the spiritual issues that are a means of support to caregivers."

Conference leaders include Rev. Walter J. Smith, S.J., author of *AIDS: Living and Dying with Hope*, The Rev. Daniel Berrigan, S.J., Rabbi Yoel Kahn, Rev. Kathryn Cartledge, and Rev. Clifford Elliott.

The conference is designed to focus specifically on the needs of the caregiver. For further information and registration, write Dr. Nancy Burkin, S.S.J., Director, Center for Ministries, Merrimack College, 315 Turnpike Street, North Andover, MA 01845. ▼

ALERT

ALERT is a monthly newsletter containing information on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment. The Editor is the Rev. Dr. Stephen Pieters. For more information, please write: ALERT, c/o UFMCC, 5300 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 304, Los Angeles, CA 90029.

New Office for UFMCC AIDS Ministry

A major renovation of the UFMCC offices has provided the Rev. Stephen Pieters, Field Director of UFMCC AIDS Ministry with an office in Fellowship Headquarters. For the past four and a half years, since the inception of UFMCC AIDS Ministry, Pieters had been using his home for an office.

The new office is open during regular UFMCC business hours, Monday through Friday, 9 am to 5 pm, Pacific Time.

For those familiar with the UFMCC offices, the former Church Services office has been divided in two by a new center wall. One third of the back space has been made into storage space, and the other two-thirds is Pieters' new office space. Church Services now has a suite of offices down the hall.

The address and telephone number for UFMCC AIDS Ministry is the same as for the Fellowship: 5300 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 304, Los Angeles, CA 90029; (213) 464-5100; FAX (213) 464-2123. ▼

Care for Caregivers Conference in L.A.

The AIDS Interfaith Council of Southern California is holding a conference on Care for the Caregivers on March 25, 1992 at the Moseley Salvatori Conference Center of the Hospital of the Good Samaritan in Los Angeles. The Conference is presented in cooperation with the Office of the AIDS Coordinator/Community Development Department of the City of Los Angeles.

The Keynote Speaker will be John McGrann, the founder and Executive Director of Kairos House in San Francisco. Kairos House is "an oasis for caregivers in the middle of this terrible epidemic." McGrann has 25 years experience in pastoral care, and specializes in seminars and retreats related to caregiver burnout, stress, and grief.

Other workshops at the conference include, "Keeping Your Head Above Water", "Advocacy", "Who will help the minister, priest, rabbi, and spiritual leader?" and "Preparing to say good-bye."

Registration costs $25 before March 11, and $35 thereafter. A special student rate of $15 and $25 late registration is available. For more information, or to register, write the AIDS Interfaith Council of Southern California, 1254 West Sixth Street, Suite 300, Los Angeles, CA 90017. ▼

Resources on AIDS & Law, Public Policy

University Publishing Group of Frederick, MD publishes a variety of resources on AIDS related issues. Among the books available are *"AIDS: Legal, Legislative, and Policy Issues", AIDS: Legal and Regulatory Policy", and "Financing Care for Persons with AIDS."*

Periodicals include *"AIDS & Public Policy Journal," "AIDS Literature & New Review," and "AIDS Law and Litigation Reporter."*

These publications are highly recommended for AIDS professionals, as well as students and anyone concerned with Public Policy, Law, and Public Health issues related to HIV/AIDS. For further information and subscriptions, write to University Publishing Group, 107 East Church St., Federick, MD 21701. ▼

AIDS Housing Money Now Available in the U.S.

Efforts of AIDS National Interfaith Network Successful

The Rev. Ken South, Executive Director of the AIDS National Interfaith Network (ANIN) has announced that ANIN's efforts at releasing $50 million in AIDS Housing money from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) have been successful.

In cooperation with the AIDS Action Council and the AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts, ANIN has inundated HUD with letters and phone calls protesting the department's foot-draging in writing regulations for the AIDS Housing Opportunities Act. AIDS housing money has been frozen and unavailable from HUD since October, 1991.

On February 10, the same day as the money was released, high-level HUD officials met with ANIN, the AIDS Action Council, and the AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts, and said, "Stop the letters and phone calls. You won."

Robert Greenwald of AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts said, "People with AIDS have been frozen out of other HUD programs for years. Now we have a commitment from HUD not only to issue an "interim rule" by June 1st, but to continue meeting with us on the AIDS housing crisis. We are cautiously optimistic that we will continue to have productive contacts with HUD."

The "interim rule" which will be published in the Federal Register, will function as a request for proposals for housing programs. HUD has promised to turn around applications it receives within thirty days, and to start disbursing funds by September 1992.

Rev. South said, "Our next step is to get money for this program restored in the FY 93 budget." The FY 93 budget proposed by the President eliminated all funding for AIDS housing. The AIDS Housing Opportunities Act, a component of the Cranston-Gonzalez Affordable Housing Act, passed in 1990. It aims to prevent homelessness among people with AIDS by supporting transitional and permanent community-based housing programs. HUD's stalling was reportedly due to its reluctance to set a precedent with a population-specific program.

UFMCC has been actively involved at all levels of the AIDS National Interfaith Network since its inception, and continues to support ANIN's advocacy of responsible public policy. ▼

Community Prescription Service

Community Prescription Service (CPS), a gay/lesbian/HIV+ owned and operated mail order pharmacy is a valuable resource and information service for persons living with HIV/AIDS. In addition to offering savings on many drug treatments, members who have enrolled in CPS will automatically receive every three months a packet of newsletters, articles, press releases and data from AIDS Organizations, PWA buyers' clubs, activist groups, pharmaceutical companies and others. A registered pharmacist is available 9 am to 9 pm (Eastern Time) to personally answer questions.

While CPS can mail prescriptions and information anywhere in the world, prescriptions must be written by a physician in the United States. CPS can supply any prescription drug and all types of medical supplies.

The National Board of Advisers includes the Rev. Steve Pieters, Michael Callen, Phill Wilson, Connie Norman, and Peter Staley.

To join CPS or place a prescription order, call toll-free 1-800-677-4323. ▼

Seattle: New Treatment Hotline For U.S. & Canada

(Reprinted with permission from AIDS Treatment News, Issue #143, January 17, 1992)

The Seattle Education Project (STEP) has established a toll-free phone line to make HIV treatment information more accessible to persons in the U.S. and Canada.

The number is 1-800-869-7837, and phones will be staffed Monday through Friday, from 1:00 to 5:00 pm, Pacific Time. STEP's regular line, (206) 329-4857, will also continue to be operative.

STEP has plans to acquire a computer BBS number in the near future. ▼

For Those We Love

For Those We Love is a handbook and resource that offers the greatest and most healing gifts that can be given: love and understanding. Written for and by people with AIDS and their caregivers, this book contains stories that put the reader into the lives of human beings dealing with the daily realities of illness and uncovers the spiritual core of the experience. In addition to the insight and strength revealed in these encounters, *For Those We Love* also offers a comprehensive bibliography of materials, books and organizations dealing with the issue from many different viewpoints.

From practical advice to moving tributes of courage, strength, hope, and love, *For Those We Love* draws from the well of faith to offer the living waters of compassion to all.

For further information contact: Vicky Collier, The Pilgrim Press, 700 Prospect Ave. East, Cleveland, OH 44115. ▼

News Briefs

(Reprinted with permission from Positively Aware, February 1992)

"Afrocentric" Condoms Find Niche

Efforts to market condoms specifically for the black community are meeting with success, according to the manufacturer of the only "Afrocentric" condom. Umoja Sasa Products of Baltimore offers its prophylactics in black, red and green packages with an outline of the African continent. On the front is a picture of a black couple and the slogan "Protect the Blood." Company founder Edwin Avent reportedly launched the firm after noting that "No condom company has ever included us on any packaging or in any marketing."

Positively Aware is available through subscription from, Test Positive Aware Network, Inc. 1340 West Irving Park, Box #259, Chicago, IL 60613. ▼